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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE NEGROPONTE MEETS WITH  
MEXICAN HUMAN RIGHTS/RULE OF LAW ORGANIZATIONS

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: On October 30, Deputy Secretary Negroponte met with Mexican human rights groups to address the concerns raised in recent weeks regarding both President Calderon,s approach to law enforcement and the Merida Initiative. He conveyed the U.S. commitment to promoting greater respect for human rights in Mexico and listened to concerns regarding what group members believe to be the sub-par human rights performance by Mexican security elements. He acknowledged that these need to be addressed, at the same time stressing that better equipment and training are fundamental to professionalizing Mexico,s security forces and curbing rights abuses. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) None of the representatives from the six human rights/rule of law organizations (including Amnesty International Mexico) objected outright to the Merida Initiative, but all expressed hope that some initiative funds would be used to address systemic weaknesses that encouraged human rights abuses by security elements here. In addition, representatives expressed concern with:

--Mexico,s judicial system: Most criticized the inefficiencies of the current inquisitorial system and cited them as the most significant obstacles to improving law enforcement in Mexico. The group welcomed reforms of the civil and criminal procedure codes that had been discussed, but thought that the could be implemented more quickly. Lucy Tacher of the rule of law NGO ProDerecho cited the move to an accusatorial justice system already underway in the state of Chihuahua as a positive development and said it was a model for what could be accomplished on a national level.

-- Militarization: Many of the NGOs raised concerns about the use of military units to fight drug traffickers. They complained about the lack of civilian control over the military, as well as inadequate investigation of human rights abuses and criminal activity, including drug and human trafficking. Lauren McCulloch, of the Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez Human Rights Center maintained that the police and military regularly exercise excessive force and rarely face consequences. She remarked that several women have been raped by law enforcement officials while they were detained but have not filed official complaints for fear of

retribution.

13. (SBU) While they did not object to enhanced bilateral counter-narcotics cooperation, the human rights representatives urged the U.S. to ensure that significant resources are used to strengthening institutions that protect human rights. The rights groups also called on the U.S. to use the initiative to leverage greater accountability for police and military accused of committing right abuses. Liliana Velazquez Ramirez, President of Amnesty International Mexico, recognized the Mexican government needs to put security near the top of its policy agenda, but said it must do far more to address concerns about impunity of police and military units accused of rights abuses.

14. (SBU) The Deputy Secretary concluded by noting that the level of violence had increased substantially in Mexico since his tenure as Ambassador here, pointing out that 250 members of law enforcement and the military had been murdered so far this year. While taking on the concerns raised by group members with regards to poor human rights performance of law enforcement elements in Mexico, he emphasized the salutary impact providing greater resources and training would have on overall police performance. Ultimately, better professionalism and higher standards would result in fewer abuses.

15. Groups attending the round table were: Amnesty International Mexico, the National Network of Human Rights Organizations, the Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez Human Rights Center, Mexico United Against Crime, ProDerecho and the Community Participation in Public Security. Ambassador Negroponte was accompanied by members of his staff, Assistant Secretary of State Tom Shannon, Ambassador Garza, Embassy DCM

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Leslie Bassett and two political officers.

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